

RECEIVED**Glenda Wiles****JUL 17 2007****From:** Harper, Rob [robharper@mt.gov]**Ravalli County Commissioners****Sent:** Tuesday, July 17, 2007 9:47 AM**To:** DNRC Press Release**Cc:** Sexton, Mary; Elliott, Sarah; Harper, Hal; Harper, Rob; Tubbs, John; Bauchman, Ann; Favero, Janel; dnr_pio@lists.mt.gov**Subject:** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: DNRC AND GOVERNOR'S DROUGHT COMMITTEE URGE WATER CONSERVATION**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****DNRC and Governor's Drought Committee Urge Water Conservation**

With the Governor's Drought Advisory Committee meeting coming up on Thursday, July 18th, conservation officials at Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) now urge locals to conserve Montana's water in the face of quickening drought conditions.

As rising heat and declining precipitation diminish Montana's water levels, stream flows are falling quickly across the state –resembling typical mid-August levels. Exacerbating this condition, forecasts for coming weeks call for above-normal temperatures and below-average precipitation. These worsening conditions promise hardship for irrigated agriculture, communities, and fisheries.

For this reason, the Governor's Drought Advisory Committee and the DNRC recommend several measures that irrigators, homeowners, and anglers can take to help mitigate water shortages.

Irrigators in many watersheds voluntarily share the shortage of surface water, and others are encouraged to join this effort. "Since irrigation is the largest of our water uses, sacrifices in diverted water make the biggest difference in keeping our streams and rivers alive," explained DNRC Director, Mary Sexton.

Watershed committees have helped this effort, bringing together a range of public interests from irrigators to fishermen to help maintain a minimum stream flow in critical times of drought. Watershed committees in the Big Hole, Jefferson and Blackfoot rivers are already instituting drought plans to protect their rivers. "By being proactive these groups have limited the impact of drought on the river and the economy," Sexton said.

Homeowners also play a role, and can join irrigators in conserving water around the house and in the yard. In many communities, surface water from a local river supplies their municipal water supply. With this in mind, officials urge homeowners to water their grass less to encourage a hardy lawn.

"Folks can water their lawns in the evening and early morning hours, and avoid watering during the heat of the day, when most of the water evaporates," Sexton said, "Watering trees may be more important than grass; a trophy lawn will survive with less water than you would think."

Anglers have an important role as well. To reduce the stress on fish from low flow and high water temperatures, officials recommend several tips for anglers:

- Fish early in the morning when the stream is cool.
- Fish a lake instead of a stream.
- Use barbless hooks, or hook extractors.

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-Try to play a hooked fish for as little time as possible before gently releasing it to survive and reproduce.

For water closure updates from Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, anglers can visit:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishing/guide/waterclosure.aspx>

As over two months remain before the Fall brings cooler weather and more precipitation, water conservation should be foremost in the minds of Montanans –whether in town or at the ranch. In the coming weeks, everyone can play a part in conserving water and can help keep our State's treasured streams and rivers alive and flowing.

The Montana Governor's Drought Advisory Committee will meet in Helena on July 19. Serving as a clearinghouse for drought-related links, tips, updates, and information, the Committee's website is located at: <http://drought.mt.gov>.

The DNRC's Director, Mary Sexton can be reached for comment at (406) 444-1948.

###DNRC###

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